



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

BULGARIA

FIRST PERSON

Entrepreneur Brings Internet to Roma Neighborhood

USAID-funded workshops help Roma develop business skills



Roma children are enthusiastic about the possibility to learn how to use computers in the newly-opened Internet club in their neighborhood.

Until recently none of the inhabitants of the five Roma neighborhoods in the town of Dupnitsa could enjoy public Internet access. Thanks to the efforts of local Roma entrepreneur Georgi Georgiev, the Roma from the neighborhood "Gizdova mahala" now have their first Internet club.

In 2004 Mr. Georgiev took part in the Leadership Institute organized by Partners Bulgaria Foundation as part of the USAID Interethnic Interaction program. After completing the 30-module program aimed at acquiring leadership and management skills, together with his peers he formed the Roma NGO "Chisto Sartse" (Pure Heart) and was elected its president.

In the fall of 2004 Mr. Georgiev attended a one-week workshop for minority representatives under the USAID Participant Training Program (PTP) where he learned how to develop a business idea, work out a business plan, organize accounting, and hire and manage personnel.

With this valuable experience, Mr. Georgiev applied successfully through the NGO "Chisto Sartse" for a small PTP grant. His Internet hall was officially opened in January 2006. It is fully equipped with computers and a permanent Internet connection. Five Roma neighborhood residents were trained by a professional to operate the computers.

The Internet club also offered a free short computer educational course. Ten participating children were selected among many on the basis of their grades at school. This contributed to kids' motivation to attend school classes regularly and to be diligent students.

Besides the training courses, the club offers paid computer and Internet services for the local population that will help it become sustainable. An average of 20-30 kids visit the club daily, Mr. Georgiev says. During the summer vacation the figures are higher. Sometimes ethnic Bulgarian kids from the nearby neighborhood also spend their time at the club.

Mr. Georgiev is now developing his idea to introduce parents to the world of information technology through the creation of a Roma Educational Center. "The idea came from the parents themselves. I could hear them discuss that the way their kids learn is already normal in Europe and that they have to know how to work with computers too," shares Mr. Georgiev. "When I asked them if they would be interested to attend similar parent courses, their answer was: definitely yes."